

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Glebe Center

other names/site number Glebe Shopping Center; DHR File No. 000-9415

2. Location

street & number 71-89 North Glebe Road not for publication N/A

city or town N/A vicinity N/A

state Virginia code VA county Arlington code 013

zip code 22203

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  X  nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  X  meets   does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant   nationally statewide  X  locally. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property   meets   does not meet the National Register criteria. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.		
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.		
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain):		

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply):

- ☒ private
- ☐ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box):

- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<input type="checkbox"/>	<u>1</u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions):

Cat:	Commerce/Trade	Sub:	Specialty Store

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions):

Cat:	Commerce/Trade	Sub:	Specialty Store

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions):

Modern Movement/Art Deco
Modern Movement/Art Moderne

Materials (Enter categories from instructions):

foundation:	Brick
roof:	Asphalt Shingles
walls:	Brick
other:	Metal/Aluminum, Concrete, Ceramic Tile, Glass

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☐ A
- Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B
- Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C
- Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D
- Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A
- owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B
- removed from its original location.
- ☐ C
- a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D
- a cemetery.
- ☐ E
- a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F
- a commemorative property.
- ☐ G
- less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1940

Significant Dates

1940

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

F&W Construction Company (Builder)

Mesrobian, Mihran (Architect)

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary Location of Additional Data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository: Arlington County Public Library, Virginia Room

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 0.8 acre

#### UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet):

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1)	<u>18</u>	<u>0317622</u>	<u>4304450</u>	3)	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
2)	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	4)	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
<u>          </u> See continuation sheet.							

#### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

#### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Laura V. Trieschmann and Carrie Albee, Architectural Historians  
organization EHT Traceries date July 2003  
street & number 1121 Fifth Street, N.W. telephone 202/393-1199  
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20001

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name <u>Forty Oaks/AG LLC (John Mellos)</u>		
street & number <u>26 Forty Oaks Road</u>	telephone <u>908/534-9221</u>	
city or town <u>White House Station</u>	state <u>NJ</u> zip code <u>08889</u>	

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to Keeper, National Register of Historic Places, 1849 “C” Street NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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**Glebe Center  
Arlington County, Virginia**

**DHR File Number 000-9415**

**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**

Glebe Center is located at 71-89 North Glebe Road in central Arlington County, Virginia. Designed by architect Mihran Mesrobian and built in 1940 by F & W Construction, Glebe Center combines elements of the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles. The building, located on the northeast side of North Glebe Road, has an irregular L-shaped footprint, and is separated from the street by a large parking forecourt. The one-story, cinder-block building has a flat parapet roof and is clad in a six-course, American-bond brick veneer with cast-stone decorative accents. The principal (southwest) elevation is characterized by the large store-front windows, replaced circa 1990, and Art Deco decorative elements including geometric floral and chevron motifs, and a central square tower surmounted by a glass-block clerestory capped by a pyramidal-shaped metal roof. The interior of the shopping center reflects alterations dating from 1970 to the present. Located behind the shopping center is a one-story, non-historic prefabricated shed. A tall, non-historic sign is located at the front of the property, along North Glebe Street.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION**

**Site**

Glebe Center is located on the northeast side of North Glebe Road between Arlington Boulevard and North Pershing Drive, just southeast of the Buckingham apartment complex. The .84-acre parcel is bounded on the northwest and southeast by 20<sup>th</sup>-century roadside, suburban commercial development. On the southwest, the property fronts North Glebe Road, which consists of four lanes with a concrete median divider. Suburban residential development, specifically Buckingham apartments and the neighborhood of Ashton Heights, is located to the northeast. The building, which occupies approximately half of the lot, is situated towards the back of the parcel and is flush with the northwest property line. Between the building and the street is a paved parking lot that slopes from the building facade to the street. Along the northwest property line is a low concrete curb surmounted by a metal rail. Along the southwest property line is a concrete sidewalk separated from the parking lot by a low concrete curb. In the parking lot adjacent to the southwest property line is a new street sign supported on two metal posts. Along the southeast property line is a low brick retaining wall. Behind the building, the land is at a much lower grade and slopes gently towards the northeast (rear) property line, which is lined with a series of chain-link and wood fences that are associated with the adjacent residential properties. The land is primarily dirt with some patches of grass and vegetation. A tall concrete-block retaining wall runs along the northwest property line from the north corner of the building to the northeast (rear) property line.

**Exterior**

Glebe Center is a one-story, cinder-block building faced in a six-course American-bond brick veneer. It has a solid masonry foundation and a flat roof with a parapet on the southwest and southeast elevations. The building has an L-shaped footprint that faces southwest towards North Glebe Road. The northwest end of the building, which features squared corners, projects into the parking lot towards North Glebe Road. The southeast end of the building, which features rounded Art Moderne corners, projects slightly. A concrete sidewalk runs along the front of the building. At the center of the facade is a projecting square tower surmounted by a pyramidal-shaped metal roof.

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The principal elevation, facing southwest, is executed in the Art Deco style and features large replacement storefront windows, dating to circa 1990, with aluminum frames and mullions. Replacement glass doors, also dating to circa 1990, have aluminum frames and feature glass transoms. Evidence of original openings that have since been partially or wholly closed is present in the northwest bay of the southwest facade and in the northeast bay of the southeast facade. The openings on the northwest projecting end of the building are separated by brick piers that feature vertical cast-stone decorative panels exhibiting an Art Deco geometric floral motif over four reeds. The openings elsewhere on the facade exhibit a number of alterations including corrugated metal blocking the transoms and vertical wood slats partially obscuring the storefronts. Piers sheathed in mosaic ceramic tiles separate the openings. Canvas awnings supported on a metal frame shade most of the storefronts. A plastic awning supported on a metal frame advertising "Fast Cash Pawn" is located at the south corner of the projecting northwest end.

Directly above the storefronts is a decorative stringcourse executed in cast stone that extends uninterrupted across the facade and features an Art Deco chevron motif. The cornice of the facade exhibits dogtooth brickwork between rows of corbeled brick stretchers and a parged parapet. The field between the stringcourse and the cornice periodically features four parallel horizontal bands typical of the Art Moderne style. The bands, expressed by corbeled brick stretchers, are used where there is a change in the facade such as at the corners of the northwest and southeast projections and flanking the tower. Illuminated signs of recent origin advertising the various commercial establishments are mounted between the stringcourse and the cornice. The projecting tower, which rises above the parapet roof, is articulated in a slightly different manner than the rest of the facade. In addition to the chevron stringcourse, the tower has a denticulated cornice created by corbeled brick rowlock headers. Above the cornice is a continuous glassblock clerestory, surmounted by a stepped pyramidal-shaped metal roof.

The southeast elevation of the shopping center is a simplified extension of the facade, exhibiting the same finishing materials, horizontal corbeled bands, and dogtooth cornice. The stringcourse is continued on this elevation, but it is unornamented. The elevation originally featured two window openings with rowlock sills but the openings have been bricked over. The south corner of the elevation is curved and the east corner of the elevation is canted. The single-bay canted portion of the elevation features openings with rowlock sills on the basement and first story levels. The materials have been left unpainted on the canted bay, revealing the original color scheme of the facade: buff glazed brick with black glazed-brick accents.

The northeast (rear) elevation of Glebe Center is two stories in height and finished in a six-course American-bond brick veneer. It is irregularly shaped, reflecting the varied planes of the facade. Fenestration is irregular with window openings of varied sizes on both the basement and first stories. Windows feature rowlock sills. Each unit has a rear basement entry. Two brick interior-end chimneys with corbeled caps are present on the rear elevation. The northwest end of the rear elevation features two entries accessed by a metal stair and landing with a metal balustrade. A one-story, shed-roof concrete-block addition is located at the northwest end of the rear elevation, flush with the property line.

The northwest elevation of the building is completely obscured by the adjacent building.



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**Interior**

The Glebe Center currently consists of six contiguous units with points of ingress on both the facade and the rear elevation. The current tenants of the building are listed as follows in order of occupancy from northwest to southeast: Arlington Laundromat, First Cash Pawn, El Encanto Grocery/Restaurante Monserrate, China Express, El Corea, and Pupuseria Dona Azucena. The two units at the northwest end of the building, occupied by the Arlington Laundromat and First Cash Pawn, were originally one large unit and have been recently separated by a partition wall. The unit now occupied by El Corea was originally three separate units.

The interiors of most of the units reflect numerous renovations dating from circa 1970 to circa 2000 and exhibit no original finishing or details. The unit now occupied by the El Encanto Grocery appears to have retained some of the original interior elements including the stamped metal ceiling that exhibits a repeating geometric Art Deco pattern.

**Secondary Resources**

A non-historic, one-story plywood shed with a shed roof is located behind the shopping center. A tall street sign on two metal posts, dating from the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stands in the parking lot adjacent to the southwest property line.

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Glebe Center at 71-89 North Glebe Road in Arlington County, Virginia was constructed in 1940 to the designs of prominent architect Mihran Mesrobian. The masonry shopping center was intended to serve the residents of the Buckingham apartment complex and Ashton Heights, as well as the many motorists traveling along Arlington Boulevard and North Glebe Road. The commercial building was not intended to be an integral part of a major real estate venture known as Buckingham, but rather took advantage of the trade drawn to the community's village center. Glebe Center was a prototype for Mesrobian's interpretation of Moderne designs for independent, competitive shopping centers, and stood in contrast to the Colonial Revival-style stores associated with the Buckingham housing project. Glebe Center was Mesrobian's first use of the glassblock as a rooftop clerestory, although the architect would employ this modern material in his later designs. Benefiting from its location along North Glebe Road, one of the most highly traveled north-south routes in Arlington County, the shopping center provided a balanced mix of everyday services and ample off-street parking that were sufficient inducements to secure a highly profitable trade in a growing commercial core.

The Glebe Center is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C in the area of architecture as a unique commercial shopping center designed in an interpretation of the Moderne and Art Deco styles by noted architect Mihran Mesrobian.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

**History of Ballston**

The Glebe Center is located in what is known today as Ballston, in central Arlington County, Virginia. Ballston is one of Arlington's oldest, most historic, and fastest-growing commercial communities. Ballston has been a crossroads of commerce and transportation since before the American Revolution (1775-1781). Known historically by a variety of names including Birch's Crossroads, Thompson's Crossroads, and Ball's Crossroads, the intersection of Wilson Boulevard and Glebe Road presented a traditional tavern and blacksmith shop that provided commercial and social opportunities to area residents and travelers. Until the advent of the rail, the crossroads was a major thoroughfare for trade between riverside towns and the plantations and agricultural villages of Virginia. Wilson Boulevard, named after President Woodrow Wilson, was formerly Awbrey's Ferry Road and originated at the ferry dock in what is now Rosslyn, while Glebe Road stretched between Alexandria and the Falls Bridge Church.

The earliest land grants for parcels at the Crossroads were granted to John Birch in 1716.<sup>1</sup> John Birch, for whom the crossroads was originally named, owned 795 acres in the central and eastern portions of the Crossroads. The largest tract of the present Ballston area was originally granted to Colonel John Colville of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, and consisted of 1,321 acres in 1739. By 1775, he had become a resident of Fairfax County and made his will in May of that

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<sup>1</sup> James Barron, "Then and Now: Parkington-Ball's Crossroads." *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 3. (Arlington, VA: Arlington Historical Society), p. 43.

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year. He bequeathed all lands to "the present Earl of Tankerville." In 1756, Samuel Shreve purchased nearly 260 acres adjacent to the west boundary of the Birch tract, extending from Lubber Run to Four Mile Run, and between Wilson and Washington Boulevards.

By the late 1700s, the Ball family had acquired parcels within the Crossroads area. John Ball acquired 166 acres in 1742 and Moses Ball acquired 91 acres in 1748. They were descended from Colonial William Ball, the great-grandfather of George Washington, who arrived in Tidewater Virginia about 1650. In 1774, one of the Ball decedents constructed a two-story log tavern on the southwest corner of the crossroads. It was an excellent site as it lay on two main roads used by local farmers to travel to the markets. As Ball's Tavern became the center of the community, the Crossroads naturally became known as Ball's Crossroads. The tavern's use expanded over its years of existence to include a store, general gathering place, post office, and the voting precinct for Arlington County.<sup>2</sup>

On another corner at Ball's Crossroads stood Mortimer's Blacksmith Shop, which also figured largely in county activities during the Civil War (1861-1865) and until after the turn of the twentieth century. One of the first Sunday schools and the first sessions of public schools in the county met in the room over Mortimer's Blacksmith Shop. By 1879, the Hopkins *Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Washington* indicates the presence of the Presbyterian Church and the Walker School, in addition to Mortimer's Black and Ball's Tavern at Ball's Crossroads.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Ball's Crossroads assumed possibly even more importance as the nearby level farmland around the Crossroads made excellent camp sites that were immediately taken advantage of by Union troops. The camp at Ball's Crossroads was called Camp Union, Virginia. Ball's Tavern, as seen in *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, became the site of a "photographic saloon" where photographers would make portraits of soldiers to send to relatives. The *Washington Evening Star* gives account of a balloon ascension at the Crossroads on August 29, 1861. The Union troops sent a gas-filled balloon into the air for aerial reconnaissance purposes. The balloon was occupied by Professor Thaddeus Lowe, who later became a distinguished astronomer and founded Lowe Observatory in California. The balloon was fired upon by Confederate troops entrenched on Munson's Hill. Although the balloon was not hit, from a historical standpoint, it was the first combat use of aircraft by the United States Army and the first use of anti-aircraft artillery.<sup>3</sup>

By 1874, Ball's Crossroads was established as a village in Arlington County. The name was later changed to Ballston in 1895. By the end of the 1800s, the Washington, Arlington and Falls Church Railroad carried commuters from Rosslyn to Ballston and Lacey Stations, traveling on to Falls Church and Fairfax Court House. Connections in Rosslyn took commuters to Georgetown and Alexandria. The railroad struggled throughout the economic battering of the Great Depression in the 1930s when copper from the overwire was sold to Japan for its munitions manufacturing.

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<sup>2</sup> Eleanor L. Templeman, "Ballston's Beginnings." *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 3. (Arlington, VA: Arlington Historical Society), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Rouse & Associates, "Ballston Times: A Rich Past Leads to a Vibrant Future." In Promotional Packet for the Farrgate at Ballston, January 1988.

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The expansion of the railroad also brought about the development of planned community subdivision and real estate sales in Ballston. Ballston had the second volunteer fire department in the county, formed in 1908. Dr. Williamson C. Welburn, who also thoughtfully had the county's first sidewalks poured at the front door of his store, opened the first pharmacy in Arlington County. The community was also the site of a football stadium with a semi-pro team, the Ballston Skulls. The Skulls worked out with the newly formed Washington Redskins in Ballston Stadium in 1937.<sup>4</sup>

More than 200 years after Ball's Crossroads served travelers, most of the land bordering Glebe Road has been developed as residential or retail subdivisions. Glebe Road continues to carry traffic and commerce between Alexandria and Chain Bridge and now also crosses not only Wilson Boulevard, but also I-66 at Ballston. Like the earlier Awbrey's Road and Ferry, I-66 links Georgetown and, indeed, all of downtown Washington to the towns and cities west to the Blue Ridge.

Transportation at Ballston continued to develop with the construction of the Washington, Virginia and Maryland Coach Company on Randolph Street sometime prior to 1956. By 1974, the building was occupied by the Arlington Division of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, which opened Ballston to more residential and commercial traffic in 1979 with the expansion of the orange line of the Metro's subway system. Soon thereafter, Arlington County legislation designated the Metrorail station superblock as a "coordinated mixed-use development district," thus allowing for the expansion of commercial and residential buildings.

**Development of the Neighborhood Shopping Center**

In the decade prior to World War II (1941-1945), Washington, D.C. and the surrounding areas experienced tremendous population growth related to the increase in federal government bureaucracy stemming from Roosevelt's New Deal programs and, by the end of the 1930s, defense activities in preparation for war. Residential and related commercial construction increased correspondingly during the period, particularly in suburban areas of Washington, D.C., including the northwest Connecticut Avenue corridor, Montgomery County, Maryland, and Alexandria City and Arlington County, Virginia. In this environment of rapid population and building expansion, a new commercial building type, the neighborhood shopping center, was introduced and became a prominent feature in the suburban landscape.

The neighborhood shopping center initially developed to accommodate the basic retail and service needs of individuals living in newly developed suburban residential areas that were distant from the traditional urban core where commercial establishments were numerous and readily accessible. Unlike the highly individualized, independently-conceived commercial establishments of the city, suburban shopping centers built prior to World War II generally consisted of seven to twenty commercial tenants integrated into a single building with centralized management.<sup>5</sup> Antecedents to the neighborhood shopping center occur as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in planned suburban residential developments for the

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Dugan, "A Look at Ballston Yesterday." *The Northern Virginia Sun*. November 30, 1987. p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> An in-depth examination of the early development and characteristics of the "neighborhood shopping center" can be found in Richard Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-1941," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 51, no. 1 (March 1992), pp. 5-35.

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wealthy.<sup>6</sup> The first true neighborhood shopping center to be constructed in the Washington, D.C. area was the Park and Shop, designed by Arthur B. Heaton and built in 1930 for Parking Stores, Inc., a development company. Located at 3507-3523 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., the shopping center served the rapidly growing Connecticut Avenue corridor along which a number of high-rise apartment building had been constructed during the 1920s. The novel shopping center served as the model for subsequent pre-World War II neighborhood shopping centers.<sup>7</sup> In the next eleven years, over twenty-five similar centers were constructed in suburban areas of Washington, D.C., with the period from 1939 to 1941 being the most active.<sup>8</sup> By the beginning of World War II, the Washington, D.C. area boasted the highest concentration of neighborhood shopping centers in the country.<sup>9</sup>

At least eleven neighborhood shopping centers were constructed in Arlington County before World War II, a statistic reflecting the rapid growth of the county during the period.<sup>10</sup> Between 1930 and 1940, the population of Arlington County grew 145% from 23,278 to 57,040, with 41% of the work force in 1940 employed in public service of some kind, primarily in Washington, D.C.<sup>11</sup> The largely middle-class character of Arlington County in the 1930s and high number of commuters created an ideal environment for neighborhood shopping centers, which were built either as independent commercial ventures adjacent to residential developments as in the case of Glebe Center (1940) or as an integral part of a planned residential community as in the case of the neighboring Buckingham Shopping Center (1939).<sup>12</sup> In an effort to contain suburban commercial development, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) endorsed the inclusion of neighborhood shopping centers in large-scale residential housing developments constructed prior to World War II.<sup>13</sup> Examples of such neighborhood centers in Arlington County include the Colonial Village Shopping Center (1935) and the Arlington Village Shopping Center (1939), both associated with FHA-insured garden apartment projects.<sup>14</sup>

Due to the almost total dependency of suburban development on the automobile, neighborhood shopping centers were located along major arteries, frequently at corners, not only to maximize visibility, but also to serve as a buffer between adjacent residential areas and the noisy roadways. By 1941, there was a neighborhood shopping center on virtually every

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<sup>6</sup> Longstreth, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Longstreth, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Longstreth, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Longstreth, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Longstreth, appendix, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Carl B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County Virginia: A History* (Baltimore, Maryland: Port City Press, Inc., 1976), pp. 247-248.

<sup>12</sup> Longstreth, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Longstreth, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Longstreth, p. 19.

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major artery in Arlington County including four on North Glebe Road, three on Columbia Pike, and two on Wilson Boulevard.<sup>15</sup> The automobile was a central element in the design of the neighborhood shopping center, as well. Parking was of paramount importance and was generally accommodated by a parking forecourt that occupied a large percentage of the commercial lot with one or several rows of diagonal spaces. Most shopping centers were one story in height with units arranged contiguous to one another, each with store frontage overlooking the parking lot and an entrance accessed directly from it.<sup>16</sup>

**Construction of Glebe Center**

Mihran Mesrobian designed the Glebe Center as a “proposed shopping center” for the F&W Construction Company. The successful design for which Mesrobian was paid \$475.00 was then erected by the construction company in the fall of 1940. The F&W Construction Company, which was associated with the development team of Fred Schnider and Melvin Schlosberg, was responsible for the construction of many projects in the Washington Metropolitan Area. This included Lee Gardens North (1949-1950), Court House Manor at 1233 North Court Road (1940), Lewis Heights Apartments at Fort Belvoir, Keswick Gardens in Richmond, the Parkchester Courts (1952) in Anacostia, and Rhode Island Plaza in Northeast, Washington, D.C. The “F” of F&W stood for Fred Schnider and the “W” for Walter von Herbulis.

The one-story, masonry Glebe Center erected by the construction company contained nine stores and ample off-street parking for forty-nine automobiles. Acme Foods was the anchor store, occupying the larger corner space. The property was initially flanked on either side by automobile service stations.

*Design Characteristics of the Glebe Center*

The Glebe Center was placed prominently on the east side of North Glebe Road, north of the highly traveled transportation corridor of Arlington Boulevard. Located to the south of Ballston, the shopping center was to the immediate south of the Buckingham Shopping Center, which was designed as an integral part of the Buckingham apartment complex. Following the example set by the Park and Shop on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, D.C., the design of the Glebe Center targeted the homeward-bound automobile traffic along North Glebe Road, thereby augmenting with the neighboring Buckingham Shopping Center to the north. The Glebe Center’s design reflected its orientation, with the façade angled to attract passing motorists. It provided convenient entry and egress, off-street parking and one-stop shopping that made it a destination point for residents of Buckingham and Ashton Heights, as well as those traveling through the community. Richard Longstreth’s description of the L-shaped Park and Shop in “The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-1941” can be easily transferred to the Glebe Center:

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<sup>15</sup> Longstreth, appendix, p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Longstreth, p. 11.

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Display windows, which would not be easily seen from the street, were subordinated to a board canopy, reminiscent of those appended to many municipal markets of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but here used as a device to unify and accentuate the low-slung mass. Pitched roofs at one end, punctuated by a cupola at their crossing, faced homeward-bound motorists. While the utilitarian role of this upper area was to provide storage space, its most important function was as a decorative feature – large in scale, simple in form – that would attract the eye quickly and make the impression memorable. As with earlier neighborhood centers, but in contrast to most retail outlets on major arteries, signage was coordinated and unobtrusive so that the building itself could remain the principal advertisement. The forecourt enabled the management to control its front space. Delivery trucks, which normally stopped on the street and blocked customers' view, were routed to a rear service alley, relieving a cause of congestion as well as improving appearances.<sup>17</sup>

The design prepared by Mesrobian included a projecting rooftop tower, which recalled the cupola of the Park and Shop. A rendering of the building by the architect indicates the tower, which projects out from the plane of the wall more than originally designed, initially included a clock on the façade. The pyramidal roof of the tower is set upon a glassblock clerestory. The Glebe Center was Mesrobian's first use of the glassblock as a rooftop clerestory, although the architect would employ this modern material in his later designs.

*Competitive Commercial Core along North Glebe Road*

The Glebe Center was constructed along North Glebe Road, a major transportation route that bisected the Buckingham apartment complex. The Buckingham apartment complex, constructed between 1937 and 1953 to the designs of Henry Wright, Allan Kamstra, and Albert Lueders, emerged in the 1930s as a national model of a successful rental housing project. Sited on approximately 84 acres in Ballston, the six-phase development was originally planned with 183 apartment buildings containing 1,817 units, two commercial blocks, three freestanding commercial buildings, three detached dwellings, roads, pedestrian paths, playgrounds, and landscaped courtyards. The construction of Buckingham, which was partially funded by the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), promoted economic recovery through the development of economically viable rental housing and by looking ahead to the growth of the automobile industry. The Buckingham Shopping Center, also designed by Henry Wright, Allan Kamstra, and Albert Lueders, was built as a component of the planned residential community, with ample off-street parking and a balanced mix of everyday services for residents and passing motorists. The commercial buildings, evoking the idea of the traditional village center, was one of the final illustrations in the Washington, D.C. area of separating stores by a street, which was a popular design among planners in the 1920s.

As the need for housing dominated the Washington, D.C. suburbs during the 1930s and 1940s, supporting commercial centers were restricted to a single, relatively small area. The FHA presented guidelines that they "hoped would leave little

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<sup>17</sup> Longstreth, p. 12.

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incentive for other parties to construct retail buildings nearby.”<sup>18</sup> As Richard Longstreth explains in “The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-1941,” many developers accepted the FHA’s guidelines, “probably more because they now viewed the neighborhood center as a sound investment [rather] than because they held an altruistic concern for community planning.”<sup>19</sup> However, in a number of instances in the Washington, D.C. suburbs, “outside interests were actually attracted to sites near a neighborhood center because they believed that they could benefit from the trade drawn to that complex.”<sup>20</sup> Such was the case with the Glebe Center, which was erected in the fall of 1940 to the immediate south of the Buckingham Shopping Center. A second competitive shopping center with a theater, bowling alley, twelve stores, and automobile service station was also planned for the area. The property, owned by Glebe Parking Stores Inc., was to be located along North Glebe Road at Randolph Street. Construction of the shopping center was announced in *The Washington Post* numerous times in January 1939, although the project was never undertaken.

*Glebe Center Since 1940*

By 1940, the commercial crossroads community at the center of the Buckingham apartment center had expanded to include a one-story grocery, post office, and additional stores on the west side of North Glebe Road. Small service stations and one-story commercial stores were erected along the road to the south of Glebe Center. Ballston, to the north, began to expand further by 1949 into commerce and trade with the construction of the Parkington Shopping Center and the Hecht Company Department Store on the southeastern corner of Glebe Road and Washington Boulevard. The Parkington, the area’s first regional mall, was believed to be looking ahead to the age of the automobile with the construction of a four-story parking building to the rear. The Parkington Shopping Center was demolished and the renovations of the Hecht Company building began in 1984. The new mall, called Ballston Common, included the renovation of two large department stores, and 135 new shops in an enclosed four-level shopping mall.

The *Sanborn Fire Insurance* Map for 1959 indicates a furniture store was the anchor retail establishment at Glebe Center. The Arlington County Office of Planning prepared a study of shopping centers in 1960, assessing the various types of commercial centers and the off-street parking each provided. At the time of the study, the Glebe Center provided eight small stores and one large supermarket of 6,000 square feet on a 36,740 square-foot site. Parking was provided for forty cars. The Office of Planning report stated “today, the supermarket building is occupied by an antique store. Two of the stores are vacant, three are occupied by a printer and the remaining three are occupied by a delicatessen, beauty shop and refrigeration contractor.”<sup>21</sup> The report, which promoted the growing shopping center in Ballston, denounced the Glebe Center as “no longer a shopping center in the modern meaning of those words. But it was modern in 1940 and met parking

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<sup>18</sup> Longstreth, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Longstreth, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Longstreth, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Arlington County, Office of Planning, “Shopping Centers in Arlington County, 1960,” October 1960, p. 4. Archived in the Office of the County Manager, Central Document Room.



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standards that prevailed then. There appears to be no opportunity to expand parking facilities. Consequently, future uses must be of the non-traffic generating variety. Present parking facilities should not be used for all day parking if it is desired to find tenants for the vacant stores.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite the determination of the Office of Planning in 1960, the Glebe Center continued to attract tenants and patrons. Today, the shopping center contains six stores, including a laundry, pawn shop, and several restaurants.

*Integrity of the Glebe Center*

The Glebe Center is remarkably intact and contributes to the historical and architectural significance of the commercial corridor along North Glebe Road. The property, owned by Forty Oaks/AG LLC, has continued its association with the residents of Buckingham, Ashton Heights, and the passing automobile traffic. The building looks and feels like a modern 1940 commercial park and shop as originally envisioned by Mihran Mesrobian.

The immediate setting of the shopping center has remained intact, with low-scale commercial enterprises to the south, north, and west on North Glebe Road and residential buildings surrounding it. The intact integrity of this commercial setting is profound, given the dramatic growth of commercial and office activities taking place to the immediate north in Ballston.

Interior walls have been removed and inserted to vary the size of the storefronts, but the alterations are not visible from the exterior. The addition of awnings and signage, and the removal of the clock on the projecting tower and replacement doors and windows are the only alterations to the Moderne and Art Deco design presented by Mesrobian. Yet, the design, materials, and workmanship of the Glebe Center have remained undiminished, despite these minor changes.

**Architect: Mihran Mesrobian (1889-1975)**

Prominent Washington, D.C. architect Mihran Mesrobian designed the Glebe Center. Born in Turkey to Armenian parents, Mesrobian was educated at the Academie des Beaux Arts in Istanbul, graduating in 1908. He took the position of municipal architect in Smyrna, later serving as an architect to the Sultan in Istanbul. In 1914, Mesrobian was drafted as a military engineer for the Turkish Army. He immigrated to the United States and settled in Washington, D.C. in 1921. In that same year, at the age of thirty-two, he began working as a draftsman for Harry Wardman, one of Washington, D.C.’s most prolific and well-known developers. Five years later, Mesrobian had become chief designer for Wardman’s firm. His work included luxury hotels such as the Carlton (1926), the Hay-Adams (1927), and the Wardman Tower (1928). In 1928, Mesrobian completed plans for the Wardman Gardens, Harry Wardman’s last big development concept. The ambitious project involved a large apartment complex of 747 units to be built on a site south of the Wardman Tower. Unfortunately, financial problems resulting from the construction of the Wardman Tower made it impossible for Harry

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<sup>22</sup> “Shopping Centers in Arlington County, 1960,” p. 4.

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Wardman to construct the Wardman Gardens project. By 1930, Wardman was forced to declare bankruptcy and Mesrobian opened a private practice, occasionally working for Wardman until the latter's death in 1938.

In his private practice, Mesrobian's Washington, D.C. commissions included the Dupont Circle Building (1931), a rug store at 1214 18<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W. (1931), and Sedgwick Gardens (1931-1932). Sedgwick Gardens illustrates his skill in combining architectural styles under a primary style, a design proficiency he also implemented at the Glebe Center in 1940. Mesrobian utilized Byzantine, Medieval, and Islamic elements and united them under a Moderne scheme in the design of Sedgwick Gardens.

In addition to Mesrobian's residential commissions, he was also responsible for the design of several shopping centers in Arlington County and the neighboring City of Alexandria. In 1940, he designed the Glebe Center north of Arlington Boulevard on Glebe Road (71-89 North Glebe Road). Mesrobian designed two Acme Stores in 1941--one on Lee Highway (demolished 1972) and one on South Eads Street in Alexandria. Additionally, he designed the Wakefield Shopping Center, which was constructed in 1946 to serve the adjoining apartment complex at Troy Street, North Courthouse Road and N. Fairfax Drive (demolished).<sup>23</sup> In the design of shopping centers, Mesrobian employed the Colonial Revival style for stores associated with housing projects and utilized his interpretation of Moderne designs for independent, competitive shopping centers.

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<sup>23</sup> Sara Amy Leach, "Mihran Mesrobian's Suburban Virginia, Garden Apartments and Shopping Centers," pp. 8-9. Prepared at the Beyond the Mall Conference, December 1994.

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Washington Historical Society  
James Goode Apartment Collection, Vertical Files, People Files  
Caroline Mesrobian Hickman, Private Collection of Mihran Mesrobian's work and papers

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The shopping center at 71-89 North Glebe Road is located on the east side of the street, south of Second Street, North, in the neighborhood of Ashton Heights and Buckingham in Arlington County, Virginia. The retail strip on Glebe Road is noted in Map Book 063, Page 10.

**Boundary Justification**

Glebe Center was developed and constructed by F&W Construction Company. The shopping center was constructed in September 1940 to serve the new residents of the popular Buckingham community, as well as those traveling by automobile along North Glebe Road. It has been associated with this site, which includes 36,740 square feet, since its construction in 1940.

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**All photographs are of:**

**GLEBE CENTER  
Arlington County, Virginia  
VDHR File Number: 000-9415  
E.H.T. Tracerics, Inc., photographer**

**All negatives are stored with the Department of Historic Resources:**

**DATE:** April 2003  
**VIEW OF:** 71-89 North Glebe Road  
**NEG. NO.:** 20460-17  
**PHOTO:** 1 of 9

**DATE:** April 2003  
**VIEW OF:** 89-A North Glebe Road  
**NEG. NO.:** 20460-13  
**PHOTO:** 7 of 9

**DATE:** April 2003  
**VIEW OF:** 71-89 North Glebe Road  
**NEG. NO.:** 20460-16  
**PHOTO:** 2 of 9

**DATE:** April 2003  
**VIEW OF:** 71 North Glebe Road  
**NEG. NO.:** 20460-11  
**PHOTO:** 8 of 9

**DATE:** April 2003  
**VIEW OF:** 71-81 North Glebe Road  
**NEG. NO.:** 20460-12  
**PHOTO:** 3 of 9

**DATE:** April 2003  
**VIEW OF:** 85 North Glebe Road  
**NEG. NO.:** 20460-10  
**PHOTO:** 9 of 9

**DATE:** April 2003  
**VIEW OF:** 71 North Glebe Road  
**NEG. NO.:** 20460-15  
**PHOTO:** 4 of 9

**DATE:** April 2003  
**VIEW OF:** 81-87 North Glebe Road  
**NEG. NO.:** 20460-14  
**PHOTO:** 5 of 9

**DATE:** April 2003  
**VIEW OF:** 71-89 North Glebe Road  
**NEG. NO.:** 20460-18  
**PHOTO:** 6 of 9